



CNN and BBC Shaping the Opinions in Different Countries: A multi-dimensional descriptive commentary related to security, military and diplomacy

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Abstract— Both BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and CNN (Cable News Network) are influential global media organizations with extensive reach. They play significant roles in shaping ideas, political movements, and public opinion in the countries where their broadcasts are consumed (Kennedy & Prat, 2018). Though these networks are independent and generally maintain editorial freedom, their influence on public diplomacy stems from how they represent and communicate their home countries' values, policies, and narratives to global audiences. BBC and CNN played a pivotal role in the international coverage of the Arab Spring, helping to amplify the voices of protesters across the Middle East (Gillespie et al., 2015). Their live reporting showcased the grassroots nature of the uprisings, framing them as democratic movements against authoritarian regimes. This coverage was vital in increasing global awareness and providing legitimacy to the protestors, which in turn influenced international public opinion and diplomatic responses, especially in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. For example, the protests in Libya gained significant international attention, leading to NATO's intervention against Gaddafi's regime (Harlow & Brown, 2021). However, by consistently framing the movements as purely democratic revolutions, both networks arguably simplified the complex local political landscapes, overlooking the deep-rooted social, economic, and tribal tensions in these countries. This resulted in global support that sometimes underestimated the long-term consequences of toppling established regimes without fully considering the potential for instability.



Keywords— Public Diplomacy, Human Development, News Agency, Public Opinion

I. A BRIEF HISTORICAL DISCUSSION

In addition, during the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests, BBC and CNN extensively covered the events, particularly highlighting police brutality and the protesters' demands for autonomy from mainland China (Cao, 2021). Their coverage emphasized the struggle for freedom, portraying the protests as a battle between democratic ideals and authoritarian oppression. This framing resonated particularly with Western audiences, leading to increased diplomatic tensions between China and the West.

Governments in countries like the United States and the UK imposed sanctions on Chinese officials and expressed public support for the protesters (Tang, 2022). However, China criticized both networks for biased reporting, accusing them of inciting unrest and misrepresenting the situation (Zhang & Shaw, 2020). The networks' focus on democratic values helped frame the protests in a way that aligned with Western foreign policy goals, but it also heightened geopolitical tensions, making a peaceful resolution more difficult.

In the lead-up to the Iraq War, CNN and BBC played critical roles in shaping public opinion as well, particularly in the United States and the UK (Mhamdi, 2017). CNN, in particular, adopted a more pro-government stance, echoing the US government's justification for the war, including the false claims of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) (Mhamdi, 2017). The networks' coverage, especially early on, helped build public support for the invasion by framing it as a necessary intervention to protect global security. This coverage heavily influenced public opinion, especially in the U.S. and UK, where citizens largely supported the war initially (Dutta et al., 2012). However, both networks were later criticized for not sufficiently questioning government motives or critically analyzing the available intelligence, contributing to widespread misinformation. The failure to challenge the narrative of WMDs had long-term consequences, including disillusionment with media credibility once it became clear that the war was based on faulty intelligence.

Another example would be the Ukrainian revolution in 2013-2014. During the revolution, BBC and CNN framed the ousting of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich as a battle between pro-European democratic aspirations and Russian-backed authoritarianism (Kamyansky, 2021). This framing helped shape the international response, particularly in the West, where governments and institutions were quick to impose sanctions on Russia following its annexation of Crimea. The networks' focus on the democratic aspirations of the Ukrainian protesters aligned with broader Western foreign policy interests in limiting Russian influence in Eastern Europe (Wilderom, 2020). However, by framing the situation as a clear dichotomy between democracy and authoritarianism, the networks sometimes overlooked the internal divisions within Ukraine, particularly the ethnic and political complexities that contributed to the country's instability.

Also, the coverage of the Syrian Civil War by both BBC and CNN heavily focused on the humanitarian disaster and the brutal tactics used by the Assad regime, including the use of chemical weapons and other human rights abuses (Zhang & Luther, 2019). This coverage helped garner international support for interventions, as Western audiences were moved by the images of suffering civilians and the widespread destruction. The networks also frequently highlighted Western-backed rebel groups, framing them as the legitimate opposition to Assad's authoritarian rule (Baden & Stalpuskaya, 2020). However, this approach tended to downplay the involvement of extremist factions like ISIS, which complicated the conflict and the international community's response. By focusing on the humanitarian aspect and portraying Assad as the primary antagonist, the networks sometimes oversimplified the conflict, making it

harder for viewers to grasp the full scope of the war, including the roles of foreign powers and the fractured opposition forces.

In addition, CNN's reporting on Venezuela's political and economic crisis under Nicolás Maduro heavily influenced global perceptions of the country's descent into authoritarianism and economic collapse (Fredricks & Phillips, 2021). CNN focused on the suffering of Venezuelan citizens, particularly the mass migration crisis and the shortage of basic goods (Charner, 2023). This coverage helped shape international views, contributing to the widespread perception of Venezuela as a failed state. By highlighting the humanitarian crisis, CNN helped bolster international diplomatic pressure and sanctions against Maduro's regime, aligning with the stance of Western governments that supported opposition leader Juan Guaidó (Pozzebon & Hu, 2021). The network's emphasis on Venezuela's plight also fueled political movements within Latin America and beyond, pushing for democratic reforms and international intervention.

BBC coverage of the Cyprus dispute often geopolitical interests of the UK, especially concerning its military bases on the island. While the UK government has historically supported the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus, it also maintains strategic interests in the British Sovereign Base Areas (Hadjigeorgiou & Skoutaris, 2019). For instance, during discussions about military interventions or regional security matters, such as airstrikes against ISIS, Cyprus has shown alignment with UK policies, underscoring the strategic partnership between the two nations. The UK government has consistently maintained a policy of non-recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as an independent state, which has contributed to the ongoing international isolation of the TRNC (Safa, 2024).

BBC and CNN have considerable influence in shaping political movements and ideas through their global reach and extensive coverage. Their reporting on major global events such as the Arab Spring, Hong Kong protests, Iraq War, and the Syrian Civil War demonstrates their power in shaping public opinion, influencing international policies, and legitimizing protest movements. However, their framing of events, especially the tendency to simplify complex situations into narratives of democracy versus authoritarianism, often influences public perceptions in ways that can have far-reaching consequences. While BBC is known for its more neutral and balanced reporting, it is not immune to criticism, especially on issues related to nationalism and sovereignty. CNN, with its more immediate and often polarized approach, also plays a key role in influencing global discourse, especially on international

conflicts and civil rights issues. They are crucial in shaping contemporary global politics, but their influence must be understood within the context of the narratives they promote and the international interests they serve.

II. AS A PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOOL

BBC and CNN play significant roles in public diplomacy and serve as tools for their respective governments to exert international influence while also shaping ideologies within their own countries as well. During the Cold War, the BBC World Service was utilized as a counterweight to Soviet propaganda, broadcasting unbiased news to Eastern Europe (Johnston & Robertson, 2019). In the contemporary landscape, the BBC continues to broadcast in multiple languages, acting as a source of independent news in regions where media freedom is restricted. This effort promotes the UK's reputation as a defender of free speech and human rights.

Also, as a UK-based broadcaster, the BBC provided extensive coverage of Brexit, often emphasizing the economic and political risks while striving for neutrality (Greenslade, 2019). Its thorough analysis of Brexit's consequences significantly shaped public discourse. However, critics argue that in its pursuit of impartiality, the BBC may have given undue weight to fringe arguments or unsubstantiated claims from the Leave campaign, which contributed to the polarization of public opinion. While the BBC aimed for neutrality, its coverage was sometimes accused of fostering a "false balance," treating both sides of the debate equally, even when one was less substantiated (Randy & Witarti, 2021). This approach may have led to public confusion regarding the actual economic impacts of Brexit. The British government acknowledges the BBC World Service's role in public diplomacy by providing funding (Gov.UK, 2023). The World Service has been expanded or maintained in strategic regions where the UK seeks to exert influence, such as Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. In these areas, the BBC is often perceived as a reliable source of information, potentially countering authoritarian narratives. For instance, in regions like Iran and Afghanistan, where local media may be controlled or heavily censored, the BBC broadcasts in local languages, offering audiences an alternative to state-run propaganda and aligning with UK goals of supporting democratic movements and human rights (Sharma & Naresh, 2022).

The BBC also plays a vital role in shaping international perceptions of the UK's response to global crises, ranging from humanitarian aid to military interventions. Its portrayal of the UK's involvement in international aid during crises, such as famine or natural disasters, can reflect positively on the British government. For example, during

the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the BBC's coverage of the UK's aid efforts helped project an image of the UK as a compassionate global leader, aligning with the British government's foreign policy objectives of enhancing influence through humanitarian assistance (Duru, 2020).

CNN also plays a pivotal role in U.S. public diplomacy, leveraging its global reach to promote American cultural values and soft power, despite being a privately funded entity. CNN International broadcasts to millions worldwide, effectively representing ideals such as democracy, freedom of the press, and individual rights (Robertson, 2012). Its coverage of U.S. policies and social movements serves as a form of cultural diplomacy that showcases the vibrancy and openness of American society. For instance, CNN's reporting on significant events like movements, particularly the Black Lives Matter protests, emphasizes democratic processes and public discourse (Henn & Posegga, 2023). This transparency, even when critical of U.S. policies, reinforces global perceptions of America as a nation that values free speech and political engagement. CNN and other media outlets extensively covered the Black Lives Matter protests following the death of George Floyd. The framing of these protests highlighted systemic racism and police brutality, which helped elevate the movement to international prominence and inspired discussions about racial justice globally.

While CNN operates independently, its coverage often aligns with U.S. foreign policy interests, particularly during conflicts. During the Gulf War in 1991 and the Iraq War in 2003, CNN's comprehensive reporting, including live broadcasts from Baghdad, shaped global opinion regarding U.S. military actions (Mhamdi, 2017). The network's portrayal of U.S. objectives, such as promoting democracy or removing dictators, resonated with government narratives during those periods (Dutta et al., 2012). CNN's coverage of international crises highlights U.S. humanitarian efforts, portraying the country as a global leader. For example, its extensive reporting on the U.S. response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake showcased military and civilian aid efforts, contributing to a favorable view of American engagement in international affairs (Walk et al., 2012). In the U.S., CNN has been increasingly viewed as aligned with specific ideological perspectives, particularly during the Trump administration, where it was often critical of the president (Lazer et al., 2017). This perception has led to accusations that CNN acts as a counterpoint to conservative media, rather than a neutral diplomatic tool. Nonetheless, during times of bipartisan consensus, such as anti-terrorism efforts, CNN can still function as a promoter of U.S. values abroad.

III. SOFT POWER AS A TOOL

Soft power, a concept introduced by Joseph Nye, refers to a nation's capacity to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion (Nye, 2008). Media outlets like the BBC and CNN serve as critical tools for projecting soft power on a global scale (Joseph, 2014). By disseminating information, shaping narratives, and reflecting the values of their respective countries, these networks exert significant influence over international audiences. Their function transcends mere news reporting; they act as cultural ambassadors, shaping global perceptions of the UK and the US (Loomis, 2009). This analysis examines how the BBC and CNN contribute to soft power through agenda-setting, promoting national values, and aligning with foreign policy objectives.

One of the most potent tools of media is its ability to set agendas and control global narratives, significantly impacting international perceptions (Wright et al., 2020). Both the BBC and CNN, as global broadcasters with extensive reach, shape how international events are understood. By setting the agenda, these networks influence what international audiences focus on and how they interpret global events, amplifying stories related to political movements, social justice, and human rights. Promoting national values is a key component of soft power, making a country more appealing on the world stage. Both the BBC and CNN, whether intentionally or not, function as cultural ambassadors for their home nations. As the UK's public broadcaster, the BBC embodies British values of democracy, fairness, and free speech (Seaton, 2020). Through its World Service, funded by the UK government, the BBC acts as a conduit for British soft power by providing news to audiences in regions where media freedom may be restricted. Although both networks maintain editorial independence, their global reach often aligns with their governments' foreign policy objectives, especially during conflicts (Wright et al., 2020). The BBC also supports UK foreign policy through its World Service, which has historically provided accurate information in regions with state-controlled media. These media outlets serve as indirect diplomatic tools, helping their governments project narratives that resonate with geopolitical interests without engaging in overt propaganda. However, both networks face challenges related to perceptions of bias and editorial independence. Critics argue that CNN's coverage of US politics was polarized, potentially diminishing its credibility among international viewers (Gilboa, 2005). Similarly, the BBC has faced accusations of favoring governmental perspectives during events like the Falklands War or the Brexit debate, leading to concerns about bias. Such perceptions can undermine the

effectiveness of media as a tool for soft power by eroding trust in its objectivity.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the BBC and CNN, as global media giants, are potent instruments of soft power for the UK and the US, respectively. Through agenda-setting, they shape global narratives that align with democratic values and foreign policy objectives. Their extensive reach and reputation as credible news sources enable them to project national values and influence international perceptions, making them vital players in the soft power strategies of their home countries. While challenges related to bias exist, their overall contribution to shaping public diplomacy and international discourse remains substantial.

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